

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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By ESMÈ STUART.

Author of "A Faire Damsell," "Joan Vellacot," "Kestell of Greystone," etc. etc.

CHAPTER LIV. PERFECTLY OPEN.

"I DO believe a wedding is as bad as a fire," said Mrs. Gordon that same evening, when, the day's work being done and dinner over, she drew a chair near the fire; "and there are the presents to be spread out for our public show. It is a great mistake Colin insisting on taking Beatrice abroad. I hear this morning that he feels sure it will be the best thing for her. I consider crossing the sea a very bad beginning to a honeymoon."

Beatrice was upstairs, only Frances and Minnie were in the room. Minnie was very quiet; she had been in no very enviable frame of mind since her acceptance of the Major. Harry Laurence had not reappeared, and her mother wished nothing to be said of the engagement till after the wedding. In two more days Minnie might then proclaim it; on the wedding-day itself she meant to tell Bee. The Major was coming the next day to ask her opinion of an engagement ring; but it is all very cut and dried work when the heart is not in the affair and the excitement of conquest is over, so that Minnie felt almost dull this evening.

"I do think Colin gets duller and duller as one knows him better," she said, sarcastically, to Frances, "don't you?"

"I suppose when one is married that does not matter; one can go one's own way. Anyhow, he is a gentleman. For

my part, I think him nicer than Major Bond."

Minnie hid her face behind a screen to hide her vivid blushes. Mrs. Gordon looked annoyed. She wished she had told Frances.

"Why?"

"Oh! he is so much on his own side. However, I dare say a woman gets her own way generally."

"Of course she can," and Minnie revelled in her feeling of power.

This conversation was interrupted by a servant bringing in Mr. Blackston's card and a message, asking if Mrs. Gordon would excuse him for coming at this unusual time.

Mrs. Gordon was all civility at once. Mr. Blackston had been very courteous and very useful to her; besides, in the future she might want him very much; so when he entered she received him most graciously.

The lawyer wanted to feel his way to the subject, and therefore sat down, having already prepared himself with an excuse.

"My wife has been thinking, Mrs. Gordon, that you will have so much difficulty in finding enough carriages on Thursday that she made me come to ask if you would make use of our brougham. We really should be delighted if you would; it will be quite at your service."

Mrs. Gordon felt quite relieved. Yes, the brougham would be a real convenience. It was most kind of Mrs. Blackston to think of it. There were guests to be conveyed to and from the parish church—some two miles off—and carriages for hire were not plentiful.

"Weddings are sad troubles!" he added, laughing and looking towards Miss Minnie Gordon. "I am afraid, though,

Mrs. Gordon won't be quite free from these troubles just yet."

Minnie smiled a little scornfully; any jokes from "people of that sort" were especially distasteful to her, though she was too ladylike to show her displeasure in words.

Mrs. Gordon filled up the sudden silence.

"Don't mention any more weddings, Mr. Blackston. This is my first experience, and I really think that next time I shall forbid the banns!"

"Ah! ah!" laughed the lawyer, "that is a good joke;" but the laugh did not bring him nearer to his object. He plunged at last into the difficult waters, hoping to wade out of them successfully.

"I really must be going home; I only came in for a minute. I am driving my dog-cart, and my wife will think I am upset, though her anxiety never makes her wait for dinner. I wanted to have a word with you in private, if I might trouble you so far, Mrs. Gordon."

Mrs. Gordon led the way into the library, where the old books and furniture looked incongruous when contrasted with the numerous wedding presents laid out on the table.

"You must excuse all these vanities," said the widow, standing by the fire; she hoped "a word" did not require her to offer Mr. Blackston a chair, for she wished to get rid of him.

"I only wished to refer once more to that painful subject, Mrs. Gordon, which, I think, we quite settled last time."

Mrs. Gordon felt the colour rise to her cheeks, but happily there was not light enough in the room to betray her.

"I think you mentioned some little diary that you had come across. From the way you mentioned it, I feel sure it is of no consequence; and, indeed, alone it would not be proof; but I should feel that I had done my duty thoroughly by you as well as by the memory of the dead, if I just glanced my eye over the contents. A mere formality, of course; but we know if this got abroad, there are always idle tongues ready to make a mountain out of a molehill."

Mrs. Gordon quickly reviewed her position, and the lawyer's somewhat lengthy speech gave her time for consideration.

"Really, Mr. Blackston, I only referred to that paper because I wanted to be quite open with you; but I am sure it is of no consequence. However, I have been so busy myself, that I have put the little book

safely away to read through at my leisure. I was much annoyed at my daughter having heard anything about this unpleasant subject."

"Of course—naturally," and then Mr. Blackston suddenly wondered why the widow's curiosity had been so wonderfully inactive in this business. Mrs. Gordon's indifference was just a little too apparent.

"I will go and find it for you, Mr. Blackston," she added, however, quietly, "if you will excuse me for a minute. Shall I ring for lights?"

"No, no; the firelight is a real treat to me."

Mrs. Gordon walked softly out of the room and shut the door behind her. She passed up the stairs feeling as if she were a thief in her own house; as if Mr. Blackston and the whole legal world were dodging her footsteps, and yet wishing she could baffle them in their pursuit of her. She wished now that she had looked over the papers, and had seen what there was in them, and how much of it would endanger her possession. What way was there out of it? There must be some means of escape. She walked very slowly along the passage, passed her own door, and went on further to Beatrice's room. A candle was burning there, for the little gleam of light fell pleasantly on the carpet; this denoted that Beatrice was there.

Mrs. Gordon knocked, and at once opened the door. Beatrice was getting together her childish books. She wanted these to go with her as remembrances of her old self; but she started up as she saw her mother.

"Do you want anything, mother?"

"Yes, dear, I want to show that diary you found the other day to Mr. Blackston; he has come to offer us his brougham for the wedding-day, so I thought I might as well let him see it."

"I am glad," said Beatrice, softly, as if to herself, and then she jumped up and went towards the bureau. "But it's locked, mother."

"Ah, yes; where is the key, child? I think I gave it to you the other day."

"No, you locked it yourself, and I think you took the key."

"Did I? If so, it must be on my bunch of keys. Just fetch it from my room. Here, take this candle. You will find them on the table."

Beatrice hastily left the room, and Mrs. Gordon, shutting the door after her,

put her hand into her pocket and brought out a key which she quietly fitted into the bureau. It opened easily enough, and just inside lay the drawer full of papers, whilst the red book was on the very top of the bundle.

Mrs. Gordon softly gathered up all the loose papers and the little book, and put them into her pocket, then she once more locked the bureau.

Her hand never once shook, and she never blundered, so that it took her barely a minute to accomplish it; she had reckoned the time before Bee left the room, and she had even a few seconds to spare before her daughter's footsteps were heard. Mrs. Gordon opened the door herself.

"Have you got them, dear? How cold it is to-night down the passages! I must have another stove put up here."

"I couldn't find them on the table, mother; but I remembered you sometimes left them in the pocket of your morning gown." Mrs. Gordon had known this before Bee had left the room; the gown would take several minutes to find.

"How stupid of me! I might have told you if I had thought of it; but Mr. Blackston is waiting in the library alone; just try to find the keys, and if you don't mind I will ask him to come up; things like these should be quite public, secrecy looks so bad."

Mrs. Gordon went away quietly. She breathed more freely now, for none of her keys could possibly fit the curious old lock.

"Mr. Blackston, I am so sorry to have kept you waiting; but the bureau is in my daughter's room, and we have been trying to open it. The other day I locked it in her presence, and we cannot find the key; but we are trying some other keys now. I thought you might come and help us, if you can spare the time. It was very careless of her; but a young lady on the eve of her marriage must be forgiven a little carelessness; she has been so busy, poor child, with packing up her endless little things."

Mr. Blackston's faint suspicions fled at once. The bureau in some one else's room, and that some one else the person who was trying to solve the mystery; also, a young lady about to be married could not be thought hardly of if she did mislay a key. However, he was still anxious about the diary, so he accepted the invitation to come upstairs.

"If we can't open it to-night, Mr. Blackston, I will have a man to-morrow to pick the lock. It was stupid of me to take

so many precautions, but I wanted to be extra sure of no one meddling with these papers. If of no legal importance, I should still like to send the diary to those poor girls."

"A kind thought, Mrs. Gordon. Yes; certainly it should be given to them. Anything belonging to their parents must have a mournful interest for them."

Beatrice was evidently not acting any part, but patiently trying each key on Mrs. Gordon's heavy bunch. She certainly looked like the culprit who had lost a key and was now trying to make up for her carelessness.

"Won't any of them fit, dear?" asked Mrs. Gordon. "Do try yourself, Mr. Blackston; men are so much cleverer than women over locks and keys."

Mr. Blackston, like all his fellow-men, was not above being pleased by a woman's compliment; he took the keys in a masterly fashion and tried several of them. Mrs. Gordon was quite sure of the result, so stood by very calmly. It was not for some minutes that Mr. Blackston himself discovered that the old lock was peculiar.

"I am afraid this will respond to no key but its own. In the days when this was made, locks were not manufactured by the gross as they are now; but pray do not take any more trouble about it, Miss Gordon, it is of no real consequence. Perhaps you will let me have it to-morrow," he added, turning toward Mrs. Gordon.

"Certainly. Shall I send it to you by hand or by post? Sometimes people fancy the post is a safer medium than even a special messenger."

"Yes, do, please. Whichever you like; it is not of such consequence as all that. Let me see—to-morrow—yes, you will be busy, of course; the post will do very well. Miss Gordon, you must forgive me for this intrusion; business is often a tyrant. Ah! ah!"

"I am very sorry the key could not be found," said Beatrice, innocently.

"Don't mention it any more. I can well imagine how such a little thing—"

"Mr. Blackston, will you kindly tell me what fee I ought to give the bell-ringers?" said Mrs. Gordon, just outside the door.

Mr. Blackston was forced hurriedly to make his most polite bow and to hurry after the widow. His high opinion of her had risen still higher. She was as upright and honourable as she was charming; so thought the clever man, quite unaware that he had met his match.

CHAPTER LV. ANOTHER MISS EVANS.

THAT same afternoon Austin Gordon might have been found walking quickly from the railway station in the direction of Audley Street. It was a foggy, dull, cheerless afternoon, such as is common enough in London; so that the bustle and energy of the passers-by seem to be the only inspiring element in the surroundings. Austin had come back to London a wiser and a sadder man. He had made up his mind that Grace was married; that is, he had almost made up his mind, for there is a state of indecision when we repeat to ourselves a supposed fact as if we had no doubt of its truth, though all the while, beneath this feeling, right down at the bottom of man's complex mind, there is the floating idea: "I dare say I am wrong; Grace is not married, and she will now believe that I am in earnest; she cannot say no again."

Such were Austin's feelings as he neared the street; but he felt almost afraid of entering it, or of finding that the house with the number he was seeking had been pulled down. Then, what name should he ask for? If, when he said, "Is Miss Evans at home?" the servant should stare at him and answer that such a person did not live there, what would be his next move? Should he have the right to say, "Is your mistress at home?" without being able to give the right name; and, if this answered, would Grace, the bride, refuse to see him?

Well, he thought, the interview would soon be over, and that would be the end of it all. At last he reached No. 17; a few more steps and then No. 19 came in sight. Austin made a desperate effort to be natural and to walk quite unconcernedly up the steps. He saw it was a nice house, but small; just the house that a young married couple would choose and call their earthly paradise. He rang the bell, and wondered if a maid or a man would appear. One can almost tell what the masters are like by the appearance of the servants and the way you are received, thought Austin, and then he tried to arrange his ideas, which resulted in nothing more clever than, "Is Miss Evans at home?" when a neat maid opened the door.

Of course, by this time, Austin had persuaded himself there was no such person as Miss Evans, and so he was almost surprised when the maid said quite naturally: "Yes, sir what name?"

Austin took out a card from his case, and, with trembling fingers, handed it to the maid, saying to himself: "Of course she means Sibyl, who naturally is living with her sister."

"Will you walk this way, please?"

He followed his conductor up the stairs, and he noticed that on the landing there was a small, pretty conservatory full of ferns and flowers. Two chairs stood there looking very inviting. Grace and her husband might have just left them. How foolish of him to have forgotten Sibyl! Of course she was Miss Evans now, and here under her sister's care she was safe and happy.

Well, Sibyl would tell him all he wanted to know. He would even be glad to see her, and make sure by her manner and tone that Grace was happy.

The maid ushered him into the drawing-room, full of old china and old furniture. It was not a newly furnished place, evidently; perhaps Grace's husband had inherited it from his mother or his aunt, and only then had he been able to ask Grace to be his wife. As Austin looked eagerly round, trying to see something he knew, his eyes lighted on a little work-basket, and he almost started. Yes; he felt sure he had seen that basket before, and that it belonged to Grace. Then, he was in her house and she was married; for if there had been a doubt about it, the maid might have said, Which Miss Evans did he wish to see? But there had been no hesitation in her manner. She had not said, "The young ladies were both in," or, "Only Miss Sibyl is at home," as the maids did at home when asked about his sisters. Sibyl was Miss Evans now, and perhaps received stray visitors like himself to spare her sister trouble.

A rustle along the passage made Austin feel suddenly painfully foolish. What should he say to Sibyl? He rose and came forward a step as the door opened, and a tall, gaunt, grey-eyed woman entered and bowed very stiffly towards him. Austin was so terribly taken by surprise, that he had not even the presence of mind to think that this "Miss Evans" might be an aunt, or cousin, or some such relation. Miss Evans held Austin's card in her hand, and seemed to him to look at it with a sort of displeasure, which did not help to put him at his ease.

"Mr. Gordon, I believe," said the lady, in a frigid tone.

"I am afraid I have made a mistake,"

said Austin, hopelessly. "I was wishing—I came to see Miss Grace Evans. I knew her in Germany." He expected to be told that there was no such person there as Miss Grace Evans; that he was a deluded man altogether; but he was mistaken again. Miss Evans did not sit down, neither did she ask him to sit down; but still she looked at his card and then at him.

"Miss Grace Evans is at home, but I think I may take it upon myself to tell you that she does not in any way wish to renew your acquaintance."

Austin hardly understood the purport of her words.

"Are you sure that Miss Grace Evans knows who it is who has called upon her, and who wishes to see her?" he said, with dignity, for this stern woman with her fierce looks made him feel angry.

"I am sure I am merely saying what she would say herself; and as her guardian, the person who replaces her mother, I must ask you to believe me when I tell you that I could not possibly allow you to see her or renew the acquaintance. I hope that you will not even try to see the lady in question."

Austin was now really angry; he felt he was being gratuitously insulted, and in such a manner as would certainly grieve the gentle, courteous Grace.

What did this woman mean by it?

"You are labouring under some mistake. I will write to Miss Evans; at all events she will give me some reason for this unexpected reception."

"I think she will do no such thing, Mr. Gordon." And the speaker walked quickly to the fireplace, rang the bell sharply, and bowed.

There was nothing for Austin to do—being a gentleman—but to take up his hat, to return the stiff bow, and to walk out of the room, feeling as he had never felt before, and almost doubting the evidence of his eyes and ears. What did it mean? What could Grace have said about him to make this relation, this female dragon, insult him thus? He raged, and yet in the midst of it all he felt a sudden happiness at the thought that Grace was still Grace Evans, and that it was better for him that this dragon and not a husband should be possessor of No. 19. There must be some ridiculous blunder about the whole business—a mistaken identity—anything rather than that Grace should allow him to be thus

treated. The post, at all events, should justify him.

But, unfortunately, in a sudden fit of happier feeling, another change had come over Austin. He had repented his conduct to his mother, and he had written saying he was coming to take his part in his sister's wedding. The worst of it was that he must go by this very train or he would not be in time to be of any use. Yet, now Grace was still Grace, he could afford to wait for her answer, and sitting down in the waiting-room he wrote her a few lines, dating it from the Warren. Then with many mixed feelings, Austin entered the train that would take him home, determined to come back to London directly he could get away from the wedding festivities.

"She must hear me, and she must believe in me," he said, smiling, "in spite of Miss Evans."

Austin reached home just after Mr. Blackston had left the Warren. By this time he was in no very cheerful mood, and was half inclined to find fault with all the bustle which pervaded the house.

"Well, Austin, where have you been?" asked Mrs. Gordon, a little injured at the conduct of her only son. "I think you might have written to us something of your doings. There are some letters for you on the hall table."

"The house is unbearable with all this fuss in it. Where's Bee?" said Austin, looking at Minnie, who was making white favours, and who cared not very much whether Austin were at home or not.

"Upstairs," said his mother, calmly. "By the way, Austin, come into the library with me. Mr. Blackston has just been here about various things."

Austin took up his letters in passing and followed his mother; the fire had been made up and a lamp lighted, and the room looked very cheerful now—much more so than when Mr. Blackston had stood there waiting for the key.

"I've been to Unterberg," said Austin, wishing to relieve his conscience. "I went to see if Grace Evans would have me. I tell you at once, mother, in case you think I wish to hide anything from you. I do not, but in this one thing I must have my way."

Mrs. Gordon blushed with vexation; she had just got out of one trouble, and here was another thrust on her. Without waiting to ask any question, she

determined now to tell Austin the truth.

"I told you, Austin, how much I disapproved of your conduct in this respect, and that I can never give my consent to your engagement with this Grace—Evans."

"I know you did; but I say again about this one matter, mother, I must decide for myself."

"Yes, you did say so, and young men generally think their mothers can know nothing at all about the subject. As you must know the truth, I must tell you what will be very painful for you to hear. This Grace Evans has a sister, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Called Sibyl?"

"Yes." How curious his mother should know about them, thought Austin again.

"I thought so. These girls are not really called 'Evans'; they took that name for convenience; they have no right to any name of their own. They are James Gordon's illegitimate children."

If a thunderbolt had fallen on Austin he could not have been more utterly taken by surprise than he was as his mother calmly pronounced these words. The mystery which had puzzled him so much was now explained; the dislike Grace had shown towards the name of Gordon, and her firm resolve not to marry. Moreover, he now saw why he had that afternoon been treated so uncivilly; his card had on it the address of the Warren.

"Mother!" he stammered, "was it proved?"

"If you doubt that I did all I could do on the subject, you have only to ask Mr. Blackston. I have hidden nothing from him—even Beatrice's last discovery, which you made so much of." Mrs. Gordon spoke bitterly.

"And who is Miss Evans, then?"

"Miss Evans. Oh, they had a governess so called; I suppose they took her name. But you must see, Austin, that I could not possibly give my consent to such a marriage. I may be over-particular, but this can hardly be expected of me."

"No, mother, I suppose not." Austin seemed now to be walking in a dream, a nightmare. Of one thing he felt sure—that Grace had not known what Gordon he was, and that if she had known he would never have had that pleasant intercourse with her.

"Mother, why did you not tell me before?"

"I fancied that my wishes would be of some value with you; besides, I wished to spare you."

"You might have told me before. As it is, she will not see me."

For a few moments there was a pause, then Austin gathered up his letters and went away. The depth of his nature had never been stirred like this before. That love should be so great, and yet that shame should step in, was maddening to him. He could not help wondering at the curious fate which had thrown Grace across his path—a relation, and yet no relation. It was too hard—too terrible. Sometimes he said boldly to himself, "What did he care?" Then at other moments he said, "My mother will never consent. Is it right to do this thing against her express command?"

Left alone, Mrs. Gordon drew a chair up to the table, took out the papers that lay in her pocket, and deliberately began to look them over. She did not tremble now; she felt that she was fighting against fate to-night, and that she would conquer it. Till now she had used what she called fair means; her conduct was irreproachable before the world; she had hoped to put off the so-called discovery at least till after Bee's wedding, and now she wished to remove the date till Minnie was settled in a home of her own. But she knew enough of the world to guess that Major Bond might not altogether care to marry a girl of no position, and with no expectations. But, perhaps, she could now hurry on that wedding as well as Bee's, and after that allow the lawyers to solve the mystery, if there were one. For even now she clung to the hope that James Gordon had spoken the truth when he had disowned his wife; clung to it as one clings to a slender branch which one knows cannot prevent one from falling down the precipice. Should she make sure, or should she burn the whole of the proofs before looking at them? If by these papers she could establish her rights more firmly, what a relief she would feel; but if, on the contrary—No, she must know now, once for all, in order to guide her future conduct. If these girls had suffered, their father alone was to blame; his lips had condemned them. Why should she care to right them, when righting them was wronging her own children? Very slowly

she examined the papers, and very deliberately she read through the diary. It took her a long time, but she never paused. When she had done, she tore out a few leaves of the diary and selected several of the papers, and without a moment of further thought she threw them in the fire and watched them being consumed. Not a scrap was left in the grate when she heaved a little sigh of relief.

"Beatrice," said Mrs. Gordon, the next morning, "I found the key of the bureau last night, and I have sent a special messenger with the diary and the papers to Mr. Blackston."

"I am glad, mother," she answered, looking at Austin, but he turned away without an answering look.

ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE.

TOWARDS the end of March last the Shakespearean world was startled by the appearance in the London and Birmingham papers of an advertisement, offering for sale one of the few remaining buildings which are closely identified with the life of Shakespeare—the house known as Anne Hathaway's cottage, and situated at Shottery, an outlying hamlet in the parish of Stratford-on-Avon. Never, perhaps, since the days when it was rumoured that the great Barnum was in negotiation for the poet's Birthplace with a view to its removal to America, has the proposed sale of any historic building created more intense excitement in the literary world; and this excitement was increased when it was reported that the trustees of Shakespeare's Birthplace had been in treaty with the owner for the acquisition of the property, but had hesitated to sacrifice the sum at which it was offered to them, viz., three thousand three hundred pounds, or three hundred pounds more than had been paid in 1848 for the Birthplace itself.

Meanwhile the trustees, or rather the small number of them who form the executive committee, were fully alive to the gravity of the situation. On the one hand, it was evident that to allow Anne Hathaway's cottage to pass into the hands of strangers, and perhaps to be removed from Stratford, and even from England, was a danger which must be averted at

any cost. On the other hand, it was no less keenly felt that the price demanded was altogether a fancy one; that to accept it was not only to swallow up the whole of the funds at the disposal of the trustees, but also to mortgage the income of the trust for some time to come; and that in the event of opportunity offering to purchase any other object of Shakespearean interest, such as Mary Arden's cottage at Wilmcote, or a copy of the first folio of 1623, the trustees would find themselves powerless to act.

Under these circumstances it was considered wise, if possible, to gain sufficient time to allow the whole body of the trustees to be convened; and a letter was accordingly sent to Alderman W. Thompson, the owner of the property, who is also one of the trustees of Shakespeare's Birthplace, asking him, if possible, to postpone any negotiations for the sale of the property until after the annual general meeting of the trustees on the fifth of May.

Mr. Thompson's reply was to the effect that, while he would otherwise have been happy to meet the views of the trustees, the fact that the property had been advertised for sale, and that several offers had already been made for it, rendered it necessary for him to proceed at once, and that he could only give the executive committee until the end of the week to come to a decision.

Meanwhile an indirect hint was conveyed to the committee that Mr. Thompson would be willing to accept the sum of three thousand pounds for the property, and this was confirmed by Mr. Thompson himself, when directly appealed to on the subject by the chairman of the trustees, Mr. C. E. Flower.

With this proposal before them, the executive committee met on the thirty-first of March, and, after some discussion, unanimously agreed to accept Mr. Thompson's offer. A memorandum of agreement was at once drawn up by the solicitors acting for the trustees, and as soon as the requisite formalities can be completed, Anne Hathaway's cottage will pass into their hands to be held in trust for the nation. As the advertisement offering the property for sale only appeared in the papers of March twenty-fourth, and the resolution to purchase was adopted on the thirty-first, the executive committee can hardly be accused of having allowed the grass to grow under their feet. It is to be hoped that their prompt action and their

readiness to take upon themselves the responsibility of acting in his emergency, will gain the approval, not only of the whole body of the trustees, but also of the general public.

The house which has thus become the property of the nation has a long and interesting history. It is known to have been tenanted in the sixteenth century by one Richard Hathaway who died in 1581, and who is supposed to have been the father of the Anne Hathaway of the poet's love. After his death it was held by his widow, Joan Hathaway, and after her by her son, Bartholomew, by whom was purchased in 1610, and by him bequeathed to his son John. The male line of the Hathaways became extinct in 1746, but the property remained in the family until 1838, when it was purchased from them by Mr. Barnes of Luddington, under whose will it came into the possession of Mr. Thompson. In spite, however, of the alienation of the property, the representatives of the family have continued to reside in the building as tenants, and its present occupant, Mrs. Baker, is a direct descendant of Richard Hathaway himself. The important question from a Shakespearean point of view is, of course, this "Was the Anne Hathaway whom Shakespeare married, the daughter of the Richard Hathaway who occupied the house in 1581?"

The evidence on this point has been collected with his usual assiduity by the late J. O. Halliwell-Phillips, in the second volume of his "Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare;" but as, in the first place, this work is not readily accessible to all the readers of "All the Year Round;" and as, in the second place, the learned author is here, perhaps, not quite free from the reproach of having been unable to see the wood for the trees a succinct statement of the main points may not be unwelcome.

The chain of evidence starts with the marriage bond given to the officers of the Bishop of Worcester, in November, 1582, on behalf of William Shakespeare, on the application for the issue of a licence for the marriage which was shortly to take place between himself and Anne Hathaway.

As, to quote the words of Mr. Halliwell-Phillips, this marriage bond "includes the only evidences respecting Anne Hathaway during her maidenhood that have yet been discovered," it will be well to commence by quoting it in extenso.

"Noverint universi per presentes nos Falconem Sandels de Stratford in comitatu Warwicensi, agricolam, et Johannem Rychardson, ibidem agricolam, teneri et firmiter obligari Ricardo Cosin, generoso, et Roberto Warmstry, notario publico, in quadraginta libris bone et legalis monete Anglie solvendis eisdem Ricardo et Roberto, heredibus, executoribus vel assignatis suis, ad quam quidem solutionem bene et fideliter faciendam obligamus nos et utrumque nostrum, per se pro toto et in solidum, heredes, executores, et administratores nostros, firmiter per presentes sigillis nostris sigillatas. Datum 28 die Novembris anno regine domine nostre Elizabethæ, Dei gratia Anglie Francie, et Hiberniæ reginæ, fidei defensoris, etc., 25°. The condition of his obligacion ys such that, if hereafter there shall not appere any lawfull lett or impediment, by reason of any precontract, consanguinitie, affinitie, or by any other lawfull meanes whatsoever, but that William Shagspere one thone partie, and Anne Hathwey, of Stratford in the dioces of Worcester, maiden, may lawfully solemnize matrimony together, and in the same afterwards remaine and continew like man and wife, according unto the lawes in that behalf provided; and, moreover, if there be not at this present time any action, sute, quarrell or demanda moved or depending before any judge, ecclesiasticall or temporall, for and concerning any suche lawfull ett or impediment; and moreover, if the said William Shagspere do not proceed to solemnizacioun of mariadg with the said Anne Hathwey without the consent of hir frindes; and also if the said William do, upon his owne proper costes and expenses defend and save harmles the right reverend Father in God, Lord John Bushop of Worcester and his officers, for licencing them the said William and Anne to be married together with once asking of the bannes of matrimony betwene them, and for all other causes which may ensue by reason and occasion thereof [that then the said obligacion to be voyd and of none effect, or els to stand and abide in full force and vertue."

The first point to notice about this bond is that it stipulates for the consent of the friends of "Anne Hathwey, and does not stipulate for the consent of the friends of William Shagspere. This implies not only that the marriage was being urged on by her friends and not by his, but also that the bondsmen felt themselves to be in a position to secure the consent of her

friends—that is, that they stood on a footing of intimacy, if not of authority, with her family.

Now the bondsmen in this case are Fulk Sandells and John Richardson, both of Shottery; and of these, Fulk Sandells is one of the executors of the will of Richard Hathaway in September, 1581, and John Richardson is one of the witnesses to the same will.

More than this, the bond is said to be “*sigillis nostris sigillatas*”—“sealed with our seals”; it is in effect sealed with two seals, one of which bears the letters “R. H.” It is almost impossible to avoid the inference that this is the seal of Richard Hathaway, used by Fulk Sandells as his representative under his will.

Again, the phrase “without the consent of hir frindes,” where we should expect “of her parents,” may fairly be taken as establishing a probability that Anne Hathaway’s father was not living at the time of the marriage; and this also would fit in with the facts relating to Richard Hathaway, who had been dead over a year when the marriage took place.

As collateral pieces of evidence, it may be noted—

1st. That John Shakespeare, the father of the poet, is known to have been on intimate terms with a Richard Hathaway as early as 1566.

2nd. That, whereas in Richard Hathaway’s will of 1581 there is an acknowledgment of his indebtedness in the sum of “fower poundes sixeshillings fowerpence,” to one Thomas Whittington, whom he describes as “my shepherd,” the poet’s wife is shown to have been in friendly relations, and to have owed money to the same Thomas Whittington at his death in April, 1601; for by his will, dated March of the same year, he bequeaths “unto the poore people of Stratford xls., that is in the hand of Anne Shakspera, and is due debt unto me.”

It would be at least curious that these relations should have existed between Anne Shakespeare and a man in the position of Thomas Whittington, unless there were something in the previous history of her family to account for them.

3rd. John Hall, Anne Shakespeare’s son-in-law, is the executor of the will of Bartholomew Hathaway, eldest son of Richard, in 1621, and trustee of the marriage settlement of Bartholomew’s grand-daughter in 1625.

These facts, though each of them taken

singly may be insufficient to establish the relationship of Anne Hathaway with the family of Richard Hathaway, and therefore her connection with the house known as Anne Hathaway’s cottage, form, when taken together, a body of cumulative evidence, the cogency of which it is very hard to resist. For on any other hypothesis than the generally accepted one that Anne Hathaway was a daughter of Richard, we should have to assume that the facts in question are merely a number of chance coincidences which have come together over a series of years, although the antecedent probability against each of them is very great, and the antecedent improbability of their concurrence almost infinite.

Against this body of evidence the only important fact to be set is the omission of Anne’s name from the will of Richard in 1581.

Now it is quite true that this fact, thus baldly stated, appears to be in itself an important reason for hesitating to connect Anne Hathaway with the family of Richard. But, on the other hand, Mr. Halliwell-Phillips has abundantly proved, in the second volume of his “*Outlines*,” that the names Anne and Agnes were at this time treated as convertible, and that even in the same register the same person appears at one time as Agnes and at another as Anne; and in the will of Richard Hathaway the name of his eldest daughter appears as Agnes.

This objection being thus set aside, if, indeed, it be not converted into a positive argument for the affirmative, and the remaining objections not being of sufficient weight seriously to weigh against the conclusion to which we have arrived, we may safely conclude that there is a very high degree of probability, amounting, indeed, to something very like certainty, that the house which has just been acquired for the nation is that in which Anne Hathaway was born, and in which the days of her maidenhood were spent; and, consequently, that it was also the scene of Shakespeare’s courtship.

It has been already stated that Anne Hathaway’s cottage is situated at Shottery, an outlying hamlet of the parish of Stratford-on-Avon. The way to it lies either along the well-wooded road which leads out of the town in the direction of Alcester, or by a footpath across the sunny pasture lands which were formerly the “Shottery open fields.” As the pilgrim passes from these through the little hamlet itself, his

first glimpse of the cottage is obtained through a belt of fir, and beech, elm, and willow, and osier, fringing the little Shottery brook which separates it from the main portion of the hamlet. The brook was formerly crossed at this point by stepping-stones, and it is not difficult in the misty gloaming of an April evening to imagine the ardent young lover tripping with the eagerness of youth to meet his beloved in the thick copse which runs past her father's door.

A turn of the road immediately beyond the brook brings us full in view of the house itself, a substantial timbered farm building of the Elizabethan period, with roof of thick thatch cut away or arched here and there to make way for the diamond-paned casements that gleam and glimmer in the sunshine, and plaster-coated walls to which the ivy clings lovingly, and where the early jasmine is even now putting forth its tiny yellow buds. The old-fashioned garden, with its flagged pathway and trim box borders, is bright in summertime with wealth of roses, and in autumn with the glory of hollyhocks and great double dahlias; but now in the early spring-tide of the year only a bunch of primroses shows here and there, and a solitary pansy, and under the laurel by the well a yellowing bunch of daffodils. Only these, and the first green pin-points on the hawthorn hedge, and the opening fronds of the currant-bushes, speak to us of the life which, under the warmth of the April sunshine, is beginning to stir in the heart of the earth as she makes ready to deck with flowers the coming birthday of her greatest son.

Mounting the little flight of irregular stone steps, we knock at the oak door with its long hinges of rusty ironwork, and entering the flagged passage, are ushered into the chief living-room by the venerable custodian, Mrs. Baker, a pleasant dame of eighty years, with kindly face, and low, clear voice, and deliberate utterance.

The room into which we thus enter is full of objects of interest. Here by the corner of the fireplace, forming an old-fashioned "cosy corner," shut in by ancient linsey-woolsey curtains, is the old oak settle, which once stood outside in the garden against the wall of the house, and on which William and Anne doubtless sat many a time hand in hand in the hush of the starlight.

The old lady makes us take our seat in the corner by—or rather under—the

broad, overhanging chimney, supported by a massive oak beam, just where the poet and his bride are pictured as sitting in Thomas Brooks's picture—an engraving of which hangs on the wall beside us. She points out with pride the quaint old bacon cupboard on one side of the fireplace, with its oak door of open, undulant lattice-work, and the initials "J. H.—E. H., 1697," carved on the horizontal bar which divides it into two panels. From the niche in the wall by the fireplace she brings out an old tinder-box, with flint and steel—a relic of her own younger days, and with a quaint apology for her want of practice shows us how it was used. Then she draws our attention to the ancient table of black oak, with reversible top—"One side for rough work, and th' other for smooth;" and as we wax more intimate, produces for our inspection the old family Bible, which sets forth in a genealogical tree how Susan Hathaway—supposed to have been a niece of Anne Hathaway—married William Taylor, and had issue John Hathaway Taylor; whose son, William Taylor, born in 1776, was the father of Mary Taylor, born 1812, who is none other than our hostess, Mrs. Baker, herself. It is strange how a genealogy such as this, with the last link of it an actual breathing, speaking person, carries us over the chasm of the years and enables us almost to touch the past, which at other times seems so far away. Mrs. Baker has heard the family story from the lips of her grandmother, who cannot well have been born later than 1756, and who must herself have talked with her grandmother Susan, our Anne Hathaway's niece.

It almost seems, as we listen to her old-world lore, as if it would hardly astonish us were the door to open and William Shakespeare himself to step into the room—the main features of which themselves help to carry us back across the centuries. The old clock ticking in the corner; the ancient dresser of well-rubbed oak; the wooden trencher, with its hollowed centre, and the smaller hollow in the angle for the salt, which in olden times was a commodity too precious to be wasted ("They chopped their suet o' one side, an' ate their dinner o' th' other," explains Mrs. Baker); the diamond-paned windows above the dark oak wainscoting; and, more than all, perhaps, the hush and stillness of the sunny day, too early in the year for the crowd of visitors to mar its

peacefulness; and the slow deliberateness of voice and movement of our hostess all help to foster the illusion; and in a few moments more we should be far away in the closing years of the sixteenth century, did not a glance at the clock remind us of the flight of time, and warn us that we must hasten to bring our visit to a close.

We follow our hostess up the narrow winding stair to the upper storey, and enter the low room which formed the best bedroom of the Hathaway family. Here the main object of interest is a wondrous oak bedstead, with pillars, richly carved with flowers and scrolls, supporting a panelled canopy, and with its head adorned with wealth of beautiful scrollwork running along a bar supported by caryatid-like figures carved in bold relief against the dark background of its panels. Mrs. Baker's grandmother has told her that "all th' old Hathaways remembered th' bedstead," and it is said by "those who know" to be over four hundred years old. Bedsteads, as we know from Shakespeare's own will, were important articles of furniture in olden times, and such a bedstead as this must indeed have been a precious possession. It would perhaps be rash to assert, but it would surely be rasher still to deny that this is one of the "twoe joyned-beddes in my parlor," directed in the will of Richard Hathaway to "contynewe and stande unremoved during thee naturall life or widowhode of Jone my wyffe," and the fellow, perhaps, of that "one of the bedsteddes in the over-chamber" which, under the will of Bartholomew Hathaway in 1621, went to "Edmonde Hathaway, my third sonne." The bed itself rests on a framework of square cords covered by a rush mattress, and in a case at the head are exhibited a sheet and bolster-case of fine old homespun linen, with exquisite point-lace hemming—the sheet itself being marked with the initials E. H.—which Mrs. Baker's mother had from her own grandmother, and which formed the "laying-out sheet, etc.," of the Hathaway family.

By the bed stand some linen-boxes of old oak, decorated with fine scrollwork, and a quaint old spinning-stool, which has long gone out of use. As we make ready to go down again, Mrs. Baker calls our attention to the curious knob of polished oak which lifts the latch on the inside, and the projecting handle which serves to draw to the door; and having duly admired all her household treasures, we descend again

into the main living room, and prepare to take our leave.

But before we do so, Mrs. Baker must needs show us the last of her treasures—the visitors' books which have been kept during the many years of her tenancy. Here are the names of Longfellow, and Garfield, and Tennyson; of Dickens, and Tennyel, and Knight, and Mark Lemon—a merry company who visited the Cottage in 1852—of O. W. Holmes and his daughter, and many other names of note in the annals of literature and art and the drama.

It is hoped that the trustees of Shakespeare's Birthplace will succeed in securing all these relics, without which the old house would hardly be itself; and that they will be able to secure the services for her lifetime of the descendant of the Hathaways who now does the honours of her ancestral home with so much grace and tact. Their purchase will hardly be a profitable investment from a pecuniary point of view, for a hasty survey of the last visitors' book leaves us with the estimate of five thousand visitors as the probable figure for the year 1891; and reckoning these at the outside price of sixpence each, the income derived from the house will not amount to more than one hundred and twenty-five pounds per annum. Out of this will have to be provided the salary of a custodian, and the expenses of repairs, which in the first instance, at least, will be very heavy, together with the cost of such precautions as may be necessary to secure the newly acquired property from fire. Even if the orchard attached to the house is let for a small sum, the total income derived from the estate will be barely sufficient for its annual maintenance; leaving absolutely nothing for the interest on the purchase-money of the house itself, or of the furniture which the trustees hope to acquire from Mrs. Baker.

It is, therefore, much to be hoped that some steps may be taken, by public subscription or otherwise, to replenish the fund at the disposal of the trustees, and to relieve them from the anxiety of feeling that they are not at present, and cannot be for some considerable time to come, in a position to secure any other object of Shakespearean interest which may come into the market.

The larger portion of the building has been for some years divided into separate tenements inhabited by other members of Mrs. Baker's family, and it would be indiscreet to offer to explore them. At the

back door we linger for a moment to note, as she directs us, the pegs still projecting from the outer timbers, just as they were when they were driven in by the carpenters who put together the framework, and who forgot to cut them off level with the beams. Then with a pleasant good-bye we take our leave of our chatty, cheery hostess, and over the pleasant undulating grass slopes, and under groups of spreading elms, make our way through the sweet April sunshine to the Alcester Road. At the corner of the way we turn once more for a last glimpse of Anne Hathaway's Cottage nestling in an elbow of the valley beneath its belt of trees. Behind it rises the outline of Borden Hill, where Shakespeare knew

A bank whereon the wild thyme grows.

Around are the pleasant greenswards of the Shottery fields, of which he desired to obtain "some od yarde land or other." The trees that fringe the distant hills are remnants of the Forest of Arden—Shakespeare's Arden, where Rosalind, and Celia, and Orlando, and Touchstone, and the melancholy Jacques lived the woodland life.

If Stratford speaks to us of the poet's birth and education, of his years as a prosperous man of business, of the material side, which is yet so necessary a side even to the man of genius, Shottery speaks to us of the ideal side, of the time of youth's opening love, and of manhood's sweet communing with the peaceful sights and sounds of country life.

It is something to know that the best has been done to secure that the outer scene on which Shakespeare's eye rested shall also be secure from wanton change, and the memorials of his youthful love be for his sake inviolate for ever.

MR. ROBERT BULLOCK'S METHOD.

A COMPLETE STORY.

By the age of twenty-eight Mr. Robert Bullock had come to the conclusion that life was extremely commonplace and un-beautiful, and it is, perhaps, needless to add that most of the inhabitants of the suburb where he lived agreed with him. But Mr. Robert Bullock did not submit, like the rest of them, to be merely discontented and resigned over the discovery, as over a matter which might not be altered by any means, but heroically set himself

to work to find a method whereby some little beauty might be attained.

I have had the privilege of intimacy with Mr. Robert Bullock from boyhood, and am a staunch admirer of his character, and I write this account of him that others, outside of the suburb at all events, may be brought possibly to think of him as I do.

We had all read attentively, and some of us had secretly contributed carefully written letters concerning the questions, "Is life worth living?" "Is marriage a failure?" "The decay of chivalry," and "The slavery of drink," when the method made its gradual appearance. Those questions had a great deal to do with the developement of it, as had also a course of romantic and sentimental literature. But chiefly "Don Quixote" was responsible. And I may as well say at once that Mr. Robert Bullock had resolved upon playing the part over again, with various amendments, corrections, and rejections, adapting it as nearly as might be to the setting provided by a Government office, a London suburb, and a daily journey from one to the other and back again in a second-class carriage on the South-Eastern; any one of which would, one would suppose, have alone supplied insuperable difficulties to the most determined idealist. But there were also divers others.

In the first place, there was the obstacle of his name. What beauty lay in the name of "Bob" Bullock? Did not that alone condemn him to the vulgarest of lives? Then why did he not change it, or at least insist on being addressed as Robert? I may give the reason he gave me, as affording an insight into his character:

"I did ask myself seriously once whether I should not change it; but I decided not to do so, because it seemed to me less beautiful to attach some new name with a less forbidding sound to myself than to exercise my courage in retaining one of which I have no reason to be ashamed, either for my father's sake or my own. I am ashamed of ever having contemplated a change. It was a windmill I was very nearly induced to tilt at."

I may, however, remark that Bob did not give this reason to the world at that time, or he might have (just possibly) escaped the further addition to his burden of the prefix of "Sludger"—"Sludger Bob" being the objectionable title by which he was alluded to in certain circles. Some idle wag discovered one day in Webster's

Dictionary that a "sludger" is an instrument for boring in sludge or quicksand, and the combination of ideas rendered it to the minds of the initiated not wholly inapplicable. Though its precise significance was not known to the suburb generally, it was recognised as more or less opprobrious, and, on account of its phonetic suggestiveness of all that Bob was not, sufficiently appropriate.

Another obstacle lay in his physique, which was of the stumpy roundabout order, and gave rise, on the method becoming known, to the name of Sancho Panza, which was not perhaps so hard to be borne. He was decidedly tubby, and any one more unlike the ideal Don it were hard to conceive. He certainly parted with the mutton-chop whiskers he had cultivated till then as business-like, but after many trials of different poodle-like varieties of beard and moustache, singly or in combination, he took to shaving clean; and this, owing to the fulness and ruddiness of his countenance, reduced the similarity to a minimum.

Yet another impediment arose from the opposition of his family, which took the form of unmerciful chaff. They were of the ultra-commonplace class, and more inclined to make fun out of him for want of more exciting causes than the whole of the rest of the street—no, park—put together.

But he overcame them all, after a fashion. He was never tired of obtaining my agreement to the proposition that "the most commonplace life can be rendered beautiful by the living of it." I had heard something like this said before, of course, but never with so much conviction, and I have never seen a conviction evidenced by practice so well and continuously. He used to declare that at first it gave him great trouble to constantly remember that there was a beautiful way of eating his meals; that a distinct pleasure is to be gained from such small abnegations as going without a piece of toast or an egg at breakfast when there was the slightest possibility of there not being enough if he did not. This kind of small platitude would have been offensive if he had not been so very much in earnest and so un-self-assertive. As it was, a great many people thought him affected and hypocritical, and he was neither.

He would declare that Don Quixote was by no means ridiculous; that the character had indeed been burlesqued and

caricatured, but that the true Don Quixote underneath the pantomime wrappings was most admirable and worthy of imitation; and that those who did not sympathise with his aims had been led astray by the absurd extravagance of the deeds to which he was described as devoting his energies. I remarked that Don Quixote excites compassion nowadays and not ridicule alone; upon which he replied that he was glad to hear it, but that people did not confess as much practically, and that if the spirit of the Don were a little more prevalent it would be the better for the world. He set out to make it so, and I applauded, waiting for what might befall.

And first he resolved that no slang should thenceforth pass his lips, and utterly refused to consider an Americanised or otherwise perverted vocabulary necessary for expressing his sentiments; nor did he allow that the struggle and hurry of the present day gives no time for the display of the thousand and one civilities so commonly slurred over in modern (suburban) society. He acknowledged with regret that he attracted remark and amusement on account of the punctilio which he introduced into his behaviour towards his own family, in the matter of offering chairs, and rising in their presence, and putting coals on, and generally acting as if they were other people's people instead of his own. He became very careful as to his dress and the occasions when he smoked, and altogether proceeded to finess to an extraordinary degree. Life was not too short for such things, and the interest the proceedings gave to it rendered it infinitely more agreeable. He maintained that the dulness and monotony of ordinary home life is mainly due to the neglect of the opportunities afforded by it for little devotions and attentions, that people look externally instead of internally for the means to make it pleasant. He called to my remembrance the beautiful Susan Winstanley's rejection of her lover for making a difference between his conduct towards herself and a housemaid, and the case of the Grand Monarque, who took off his hat promiscuously, and various others. We had a long discussion once on this observance. I had remarked that the common-sense view of the matter was that no man is called upon to take off his hat to any woman with whom he is brought into contact who is incapable of appreciating the attention; to which he

answered that, even were it acknowledged that some women are so incapable, the difficulties of drawing the line between those who can and cannot appreciate the attention would be so tremendous as to justify any one in declining to make a disparaging discrimination, on that ground alone; that the act was due to all. "Even to the crossing-sweeper, on giving her a penny, regardless of her insobriety at the time?" Even to her, he replied. And he certainly carried out his theory. In shops, at luncheon bars, in the streets, to applewomen, flower-sellers and all, he behaved with equal consideration and politeness; and if to any more than to the rest, to his own sisters. He was always giving up his seat in omnibuses and at places of entertainment. He confessed that he often did so reluctantly, that the flesh was weak, and that in so far he remained most unbeautiful. "But," he said, "true politeness is the effect of an ever present involuntary feeling in a man that he is a gentleman; and if this feeling is not intuitive, the best thing he can do is to attempt to render it so by constant practice. Only through self-conscious application to details can an ordinary man hope to attain to that unconscious habit of self-denial, typical of the nobly born or naturally chivalrous."

I reminded him once that a rough-and-ready manner often covers a kind and gentle heart; and he agreed with me, adding, however, that, as he was not aware that his heart was either particularly kind or gentle, the rough-and-ready manner could be advantageously dispensed with in his case. I also reminded him that too much study of littlenesses might withdraw his attention from the big facts and prime necessities. He replied by disputing the implied definition of littlenesses, and asked me what I thought Kingsley meant by his recommendation to "do noble things, not dream them all day long"; and what George Eliot meant by saying that "We prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil, which gradually determines character."

He wished to make his life beautiful, and, as it seemed unlikely that he would be permitted to do so on any impressive or publicly tremendous scale, he intended to see what might be made of it in his small way, by unremitting attention.

This was all indubitably to his credit; but it involved him in no little ridicule, as I have said. Whether this was his or

the suburb's fault I leave to others to decide, myself being somewhat prejudiced, perhaps.

So "Sludger Bob" imported his grace into everything, and his grace became a lamentable source of merriment. The atmosphere was unsuitable. He was regarded as a prig by the ordinary young heathen of the neighbourhood, with their slang and animal spirits. He became a butt for their vulgar jokes, and his grace was hard put to it. I am proud to say that he neither flinched nor failed eventually. And he had his revenge, and a fine revenge it was; but of that presently.

It was a recognised pleasantry at dances to introduce Bob to every possible chaperon and all the ugliest girls, in reliance on his chivalry to take the former in to supper and dance with the latter all the evening without an effort to escape. At the tennis club, too, Bob was always paired with the bad players, and came off very badly at tea-time, when he acted as waiter in ordinary, and was condemned in consequence to satisfy himself with the washiest tea and the remains of the cakes. He would fetch balls for any length of time, so that often he got no tea at all.

People were always laying traps for him, too, and involving his politeness in conflict with his duty to Her Majesty's Government, "relying upon him" to help them at social gatherings and parochial entertainments, and the getting of them up. Bob always had the hard work and unshowy share of the business to do. He was pestered by every one in the neighbourhood who wanted a little of somebody else's time—the most inconvenient for choice—for nothing. And the clergy were naturally the foremost to profit by him.

In spite of all this, Bob retained his grace and affability, exhaled his beauty and extracted his pleasure without ceasing, regardless of obstruction and annoyance of every kind.

It does not seem given to the modern middle-class girl to appreciate the mode of behaviour adopted by him towards women. Bob went in for devotion and worship, and endeavoured to regard girls in general as beings of a higher order. Our suburban supply was of the most unromantic. They danced and flirted and ran after amusement and excitement, and attributed to themselves the usual allowance of common sense and dislike of everything silly and sentimental or out of date. They dis-

believed in their mission to be anything but cheerful and lively and go-ahead. They thought of their frocks and exteriors, and frizzed their hair, and aimed at looking "fetching," and talked gossip and slang, and "went on" generally. They smirked at Bob's politenesses, accepted them with self-conscious giggles, and chaffed him afterwards. Bob was so solemn about it all, and our society could not dispense with flippancies of the would-be smart kind without becoming bored. Life was too serious, they said, as it was, to stand the addition of Bob's mediæval business. They considered themselves downright and hearty and healthy, and no doubt they were.

Bob therefore remained without Dulcinea. He would have made the object of his affections his princess, his inspiration, his power, his purity, his praise, his peace, and all that Mr. Ruskin told him to look for; he could not properly worship any girl who only wanted to be kissed a little and "see herself settled."

Now it came to pass, when the system had been established for about a year, and the merriment at Bob's expense was at its height, that a certain Miss Madge Hunter came to stay with her friends, the Spar-Joneses, for the summer. Her reputation for prettiness and "go" preceded her by about a month. She was described as full of fun and spirits; and so, indeed, she proved. She "woke the place up a bit," in accordance with her announced intention; and all the young men went mad about her, and all the maidens envied her, and either imitated or did the opposite openly. In spite of his preconceived notions as to what a girl ought to be, Bob fell hopelessly in love with her like the rest, which vastly entertained her. For she was one of those who go about seeking whom they may captivate; and variety pleased her. Bob supplied quite a new article.

She was a dainty maiden, slenderly formed and delicately featured, with pouting lips and wonderful eyes which exacted immediate and unconditional obedience to her slightest whims. Perhaps it was this characteristic that "fetched" Bob; this call for "subjection to the command of his lady." He became her humble slave, and followed her about in a submissive and self-effacing manner, which allowed of any number of gallants besides, and yet kept him ready at a moment's notice. She described him as a most

useful creature, and extorted from him all sorts of menial offices, which no doubt exalted Bob in his own estimation to the full extent authorised by his notions concerning knightly service; while she flirted unconscionably with all the "availables" around and mocked him openly before them.

He regarded this as royal disdain, and took to writing poetry, some of which he showed to me by way of publication, and submitted to her scorning patiently and uncomplainingly, as he felt it his loyal duty to do. I am bound to say that she seemed to me rather flighty than vulgar; but then beauty and liveliness cover a multitude of objectionabilities. She was trivial and flippant rather than fast, a dashing young woman of the world, and oh! so very sweet at times. And considering the event, I have forgiven her much.

It happened in this wise. Mrs. Spar-Jones gave a dance in her honour, and Bob went, as did also a number of her chief admirers, amongst whom a Mr. Gerald Howard was reckoned to have the best chance of obtaining an ultimate preference. Mr. Gerald Howard objected to Bob's "knightly service," but Bob was a man you could not quarrel with, for the proverbial reason. As he could not duel, and refused the vulgarity of fisticuffs, the only way for him to avoid the difficulties connected with the avenging of insults was to refuse to take any notice of them at all; which he accordingly did.

Mr. Gerald planned all sorts of humiliations unsuccessfully; but at last he hit upon a grand idea. Relying upon the favour with which he regarded himself as particularly honoured, he suggested to Miss Madge Hunter a practical joke of a very magnificent kind. This was for her to lead Bob on to a proposal, and then tell us all how he did it. This would be a source of enlightenment and entertainment at the same time. Miss Madge fell in with the proposition at first with all the alacrity her love of fun prompted, and agreed to do it at the dance. On the eventful evening she accordingly allowed Bob one waltz towards the bottom of the programme, which put him into a state of great enthusiasm for the whole evening, and set him cavorting round his ugly girls and escorting his chaperons in to refreshments with a readiness and cheerfulness unusual even in him. At last his reward came. He claimed his dance, he

danced the whole of it with all the grace he had cultivated for a year, and at the end of it she commanded him to take her in to supper. After that it subsequently appeared that she commanded him to sit with her in the conservatory; and the rest of us exchanged smiles, and some of us felt ashamed. Some of us also looked a trifle anxious; Mr. Gerald Howard was one. In time, however, the couple reappeared, Mr. Robert Bullock appearing thoughtful — dejected we considered at once — and Miss Madge gayer than ever. She must have been a bit of an actress. The Sludger almost immediately departed, and she gave Mr. Gerald Howard the last waltz. He was to report to us. But later, when we met outside to hear all about it, it seemed that he had nothing to report except that Miss Hunter had been in the greatest spirits, and had promised to show us exactly what had happened, on condition of Mr. Howard's obtaining invitations for us all, including Bob, to the dance to be given by Mr. Gerald Howard's mamma that day week. Mr. Gerald Howard seemed somewhat apprehensive that all was not quite right, but it was the general opinion amongst the rest of us that we were in for a spree of considerable proportions on the occasion.

In the interval Miss Hunter appeared as usual at the tennis club and elsewhere, and disported herself after her accustomed lively manner; but Bob never showed up once, which confirmed the opinion that he had been rejected as anticipated, and was bewailing his fate in mountain solitudes, or their suburban substitutes. The invitation given him in accordance with Miss Hunter's command was accepted, which brought an element of doubt into the matter. But Bob was a man who might have been ordered not to make himself ridiculous for a loss like that, and would have obeyed at once. To me—and I found out afterwards to others—the plot appeared pretty thin, and before the promised day of revelation, I asked Miss M. one afternoon if she would not give me a hint as to what was to happen. She knew me for Bob's particular friend, and turned quite serious on the instant. We happened to be out of others' hearing, for a wonder, at the tennis club. She only said: "He is worth the whole lot of them put together, and they shall know it, too." I think she added a "jolly well."

On the night of Mrs. Howard's dance

we all took care to come early. Bob looked more serious than ever, and was laughingly complimented on his good health, "considering." He did not laugh.

Strange to say, he also did not dance as usual for the first six dances.

Miss Hunter gave Mr. Howard the first waltz, as a recognition of his position as son of the house, and then danced a few "duty" dances, to get them over, she told me. Then she gave me one, and Mr. Howard began to hover and look pale and frenzied. Then, when he and the rest of them crowded round her petitioning, Bob was observed to approach with a smile of blended triumph and humility. She looked through them all, and remarked: "I am sorry I have no more left at all, not even an extra." Sludger Bob had the rest.

That is how the practical joke ended, and all we ever knew as to Bob's method of proposal. He must have practised to good effect to have succeeded in exciting such a sudden and complete admiration for his earnestness and devotion, and the beauty of his life and "knightly service." It was a case of love or contempt, and his service was too perfect to gain nothing but the contempt of a noble girl. At heart flighty Miss Madge was noble, as I have realised since.

Bob told me some time afterwards, in explanation of his not dancing the first six with his usual plain partners, that he had been ordered to dance that night with no one but his—wife.

SCIENCE GRATIS.

IF there is one point of his character upon which the British countryman prides himself more than the rest, it is his eminently practical way of looking at things, and especially at those things which are his every-day concern. He has a mighty contempt for all knowledge which is got out of books, and, indeed, for the most part, declines to admit its title to be called knowledge at all when placed by the side of the solid lessons of experience, gained in the process of many painful generations. Of course, theory with him ultimately ripens into practice; but the growth is a very slow one. Fifty years ago there was a great shout of incredulity at the notion that corn and roots could be grown from guano and artificial manure, as the men of theory contended they could be

grown; and, though on this point the lessons of experience have converted even the most stubborn, there is still a disposition to view every fresh pronouncement of agricultural science with watchful scepticism. Thus many of the old gibes and local sarcasms, which had done duty for half a century and more, were trotted out again in the market-places and villages when it became known that the Government were going to send round lecturers to teach the people things which were not to be learnt at the elementary schools, agricultural chemistry being included in the new curriculum.

Any parishioner walking down what was by courtesy known as "the street" at Blanham End on a certain dark November evening, would have been conscious that there was something out of the common going on. The street, be it understood, is a dark muddy road with high thorn hedges on either side, only justified as to its name by the presence of divers cottages dotted about for some half-mile of its length; and, at a sharp turn, five or six built close together with the Chequers in their midst. Both of the ground-floor windows of the public-house are illuminated, and shadowy forms are seen passing to and fro inside; and this is not all. In the yard adjoining stands the "po'shay" from the neighbouring town, and through the open door of the stable one may see a man in a shabby livery coat tending a battered-looking old horse by the light of a tallow candle. A crowd of at least a dozen old men, young men, and little children, are staring as hard as they know how at this unwonted illumination. Rarely is anything like it seen in Blanham End Street; but this physical manifestation is, peradventure, only a foreshadowing of an intellectual counterpart soon to follow elsewhere.

Going down the road a little farther one comes upon more light. The school-room windows are all ablaze, and illuminate the puddles which the heavy rains have left on the surface of the village green. Manifestly there is something agog. Let us enter and learn what it may be. A large placard on the wall inside tells the secret. To-night is to be given the first lecture at Blanham End under the Technical Education Scheme of the County Council.

The unwonted stir in the village, and the apparition of the "po'shay" at the Chequers, were indications of the presence of the scientific lecturer. He is not altogether a stranger to his audience.

Once he carried on the business of an ironmonger in a neighbouring town; but the opportune death of an uncle enabled him to have done with pots and kettles, and to cultivate an innate taste for exploring the mysteries of nature, and even to study at South Kensington. These facts are widely known in Blanham End, and there will be an additional curiosity to see what learning may have done for a man who, a year or two ago, was just such another as Mr. Huggins, the draper, or Mr. Ribstone, the butcher. Inside the school-room, the working platform, heretofore only used for the frivolous purposes of choir concerts and penny readings, is prepared for more serious work. On a table is arranged the customary plant of glass vessels and twisted pipes and spirit lamps. The advent of the Vicar, and of three or four of the principal farmers, gives the sign for the filling of the room, and the loiterers from without straggle in and occupy the back benches, with a vast amount of pushing and clatter. The lecturer appears suddenly on the platform from a door at the back, and looks round the room and smiles nervously as the Vicar rises and goes through the form of introducing him to the meeting; and, with the generosity that is never wanting in an English audience, there arises from the body of the room a thumping of hob-nailed boots on the wooden floor to welcome the teacher—a generosity all the more striking seeing that the thumpers know little of, and care less for, the intellectual fare which is to be set before them this evening. They have come simply for the sake of something to do; to spend one evening otherwise than in the deadly dull routine of their ordinary life.

The introduction of the science of chemistry to a rural audience requires naturally a prelude couched in familiar terms, and the phase of the fascinating science itself which is to be dealt with is bound to be that known as "agricultural." One vast gape of wonder and incredulity combined overspreads the face of the audience as the lecturer recounts the marvellous organisation of the commonest objects of field or hedgerow—objects which every hour of the day are trodden under foot and disregarded—and goes on to speak of plant nourishment, and of the unsuspected constituents which go to make up a kernel of wheat or a pound of potatoes. Incredulity gains the upper hand as he proceeds to tell them that the

very air they breathe, which no one can either touch, or taste, or handle, is made up of things bearing names too long and strange to repeat or to remember. Indeed, with such intelligences as those with which he has to deal, interest cannot be long sustained without the application of some form of concrete teaching, and there are symptoms of relief when the lecturer turns to the table and begins to get his vessels and his tubes into working order for his experiments.

Of course he has a great deal to say about oxygen, repeating the word some half-a-dozen times in his first sentence.

"I never knew as kimmistry had owt to du wi' bullocks, did you, Jim?" said one student to another in a hissing whisper.

"Bullocks! Wha' d'yer mean?"

"Mean? Why, ha'n't he been a-talkin' about ox o' this and ox o' that ever since he started?"

"He don't mean nawthun about bullocks, I tell yer. Kimmistry ha' to du wi' pills and things as you git from the doctor, and them great blue and yaller bottles in shop winders."

Here the colloquy is interrupted by the announcement that the apparatus is ready for the first experiment. There is breathless excitement as the liquids and powders are being adjusted, and a smothered guffaw is heard as the lecturer burns his finger with a match as he sets the spirit lamp going.

"How'd you like a dose o' that fizzick, Ben? That 'ud make you set up to rights, I reckon."

Ben grins appallingly at the notion; but his eyes are fixed on the retort, which is now beginning to bubble. The experiment comes off successfully, and a minute afterwards the hitherto suppressed laughter asserts itself in ripples all down the room as an awful smell spreads from the platform all over the place—sulphuretted hydrogen has apparently broken loose. There is a genteel tittering and production of handkerchiefs by the farmers' wives and daughters who occupy the front benches; but in the back part of the room the demonstrations of opinion are alike more candid and forcible.

"Lord ha' mussy!" gasped Ben; "if that there stink bain't wus an' rotten tannups by a sight; 't reglarturn mystemmick that du."

"Arsk that there mawther Jane Green to pass her handkercher down this way. She's mazin fond o' lavender water, I know," whispers Jim.

The origin of the smell having been described, and the charm of its novelty having worn off, the lecturer goes on with some of the old stock tricks of his calling. He blows carbonic acid into lime-water, and straightway it becomes as white as milk; and on this manifestation of the chemist's power over nature the audience rises to a point of interest, or even enthusiasm, such as it has never approached before.

"Blarm me, if that ain't a trick worth knowin' on. With a bottle o' that stuff nobody 'ud ever want a cow or three acres o' land either."

"Ab, bor, but you'd better taste it first!"

"Taste it? I'll be bound as that be just as good as the milk you git from old Dick Harris."

"Arsk the gentleman to pass it round and let us try it."

After a little the running comments of the audience threatened to drown the voice of the lecturer altogether, so the Vicar rose and, in his most severe professional voice and manner, commanded silence.

In the next place, the lecturer went on to inform his audience that every individual member of it, by the simple and necessary act of breathing, became, so to speak, a burning fiery furnace; that combustion was constantly going on within us; and that unless the fire were constantly fed by oxygen, we should go out like so many spent candles. He dilated on other and still more wonderful processes in our bodily economy, which the simplest action on our part must set in motion; but marvellous as these statements were, they failed to hold the attention of the audience for long. Signs of weariness were soon visible, and then the lecturer—who certainly kept himself exceedingly well in touch with his hearers—again turned on the experimental tap. First, he gave them another bad smell—bad smells are infallible scores in these cases—and was rewarded by an immediate rekindling of attention. Then he burnt a lump of charcoal in oxygen, and we were all as wide awake again as ever. The brilliant spark of a bit of iron wire in combustion brought straining, breathless silence; and the blinding flame of ignited phosphorus roused the most enthusiastic manifestation of interest of all the evening, except, perhaps, that occasion when the lecturer knocked a flask off the table and spattered the first row of the audience with some unsavoury compound.

At the end of the lecture the same applause which had marked its opening was renewed, in confirmation of the laudatory remarks in which the Vicar offered the thanks of the meeting for the interesting exposition they had just listened to. The villagers, on the whole, had passed a fairly pleasant evening. At any rate, it was a little change, and that counted for something in Blanhams End. Still, it would have been interesting, and useful as well, for an expert to have gone through the village at the end of the course and to have searched for some trace of the sprouting of the seed scattered by the chemical lecturer. It is doubtful whether even the meaning of his words was apprehended; and, if it had been understood ever so plainly, it would have borne no fruit without subsequent progressive study—a condition plainly impossible. To try to teach chemistry, of all subjects in the world, in this fashion, is surely most futile. Luckily, some of our County Councils have been more circumspect in their choice of subjects of technical education. Dairying, bee-keeping, fruit culture, and cookery have been dealt with more successfully; but it is to be feared that the trail of the smatterer is over the whole business. It is sometimes an embarrassment to be given a five-pound note wherewith to purchase oneself a present; and the County Councils, as a whole, were a little flustered with the burden of their benefit, and too inexperienced to get the full value out of it.

The shortness of Cleopatra's nose is held by philosophers to have affected materially the destiny of nations. Trifles have ruled the world from the beginning, and their activity is assuredly not yet exhausted. A clever statesman forgets or ignores the existence of Chadband in politics; and, as a consequence, elementary chemistry is expounded to the population of Blanhams End. No doubt our clever statesman thought that, by spending the money in this fashion, he might, for a season, ward off the enmity of Chadband and stop his mouth; but he ought to have known Chadband better than this; and in any case it would have been a poor use to which to put the good money, which was sorely wanted for other purposes. For instance, it might have been spent in making more secure those fields which we are to cultivate hereafter on scientific principles; and those cows which are to yield such tons of cheese and butter under improved dairying. No doubt the evening's

entertainment I have just described, and the many hundreds like it which have been given this winter throughout the land, have, in a way, lessened the tedium of country life, though falling far behind amateur Christys and comic readings and songs; but it would possibly have been more consoling to the country at large to know that the money had been expended in giving us a few guns which would go off without bursting, and in making our foreign coaling stations secure from all risk of a coup de main.

THE THIRTEENTH BRYDAIN.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "Mr. Wingrove's Ways," "The Vicar's Aunt," "Dick's Wife," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. KINGSTON wished to send out her cards for the fifth of May, and as the day on which Brydain and his aunt and cousin had met at the Farrants' house was the second Monday in April, there was no time to be lost in getting up the operetta. Within a very few days, Brydain, with Tiny to help him, had settled all the necessary preliminaries. Tiny saw and secured the girl who was to sing the soprano part. She was a Miss Armitage, a clever, good-natured girl, who entered heartily into the scheme, as she would have done into any scheme from which amusement might be extracted. Tiny also saw Etrenne Farrant again, and reassured her as to her power of singing the part. On the perusal of the music, which Brydain, faithful to his word, had promptly sent her, her confidence had begun to fail her. But Etrenne was ready enough to be reassured. Without possessing, like Miss Armitage, an insatiable thirst for it, she had yet a girlish and natural interest in any new form of amusement, and also, there were in her mind stronger motives of which she, as yet, knew nothing but their promptings.

These points settled, Tiny and Brydain had to arrange a time and place for rehearsals which should be convenient for Miss Armitage, Etrenne, and Brydain himself. This was not accomplished without some trouble; but finally, three rehearsals a week were arranged for, and the Kingstons' house was chosen as the place.

At the end of the first, which was

long, having been much prolonged by the inevitable difficulties of such an occasion, Brydain took his leave first of Miss Armitage, and of Rachel, who had been playing for them, and then of Etrenne Farrant, and rushed away to keep an appointment with Mr. Lennard, with an undefined but very strong feeling in his mind that he had rarely enjoyed an hour and a half so much, and a very definite longing for the next rehearsal to take place. He neither sought nor gave any reason for the longing. The rehearsal had been "very jolly," he thought to himself; and as it was the first work of the kind he had as yet done, the novelty, had he searched for a reason, would have amply provided one to his mind.

But during the three weeks that intervened between the first rehearsal and the last, Brydain had neither time nor thought to spare for reasonings of any sort. His days were completely filled up.

His lessons went on, as heretofore, and also every half-hour of his usual practising time. He had taken, at Mr. Lennard's absolute order, two days' rest after the concert; but the short holiday only made him redouble his work after it. And besides the ordinary work of every day, there was an amount of excitement and success in his life at present. He had received, through Mr. Lennard, a day or two after the concert, offers to sing at three different concerts—one in May, and two in June. These offers he had, of course, accepted; and they were followed by several others of varying importance as to degree; but all important to Brydain, as bringing him before the public, and on that account, not one to be refused.

As soon as the season had begun, Brydain had received cards for At Homes and evening parties from several of the people whom he had met at the parties he had been to with the Kingstons in the winter; people whose vague recollection of him as a handsome young man, who probably danced, had been quickened into lively interest by his public appearance and success. Some of these parties took place during the three weeks of the rehearsals.

All this involved, of course, a considerable amount of time, and a great deal of extra work and thought, on Brydain's part. He gave it all, with the utmost content. He was too excited, and too surprised, and well contented at the—to him—unexpected developement of his pros-

pects, to think for a moment grudgingly of any labour that might be involved; and also he was far too much in earnest to spare pains over any detail connected with work.

Brydain consequently spent these weeks in a sort of whirl, in which, as Tiny laughingly told him one day, he was "always rushing away!"

But he did not, for all this, lessen or shorten the time he spent on the rehearsals themselves. He rather increased it. He provided, with care and infinite pains, that the time arranged for them should never be infringed in the least by other engagements on his part. He did not know that he was actuated in doing this by any but a conscientious motive. He was utterly unconscious of the fact that he placed the rehearsals first of all in his day's work, and made every other appointment fit in with them. He did not know that he looked forward to each one with a keener and deeper interest than the last; and he did not analyse the feeling of blank disappointment with which he became suddenly aware, as he walked away from Weymouth Street on the afternoon of the second of May, that there was only one more rehearsal to come.

The day of the last rehearsal was rainy and cloudy; May had set in with a showery chilliness, which was in depressing contrast to the soft warmth of April; and the small fire which was burning in the Weymouth Street drawing-room looked quite cheery as Brydain entered it at three o'clock. He was the first to arrive. Rachel was sitting alone at the piano, touching soft chords with her left hand as she waited.

"I'm quite sorry this is the last rehearsal," she said, swinging herself round on the stool to face Brydain, as he stood near the fire.

"So am I," he said; "they have been very pleasant." There was an emphasis in his tone that struck Rachel, but she had not time to dwell on it, for at that moment the drawing-room door opened to admit Miss Armitage and Etrenne Farrant.

"We have come together," said the former to Rachel, in a cheery voice that accorded perfectly with her good-natured temperament; "Miss Farrant picked me up at the station, and we shared a cab!"

Etrenne, meanwhile, was shaking hands with Brydain, who had very quickly started forward to greet her.

"I should think you must be thankful that this is the last rehearsal," she said, looking at him smilingly.

"No, I'm sorry," he said, hastily, "very sorry."

"When we've been such an awful trouble to you, Mr. Brydain?" laughed Miss Armitage, who had tossed her hat into a chair, and come towards the fire. "I believe I know that duet to-day," she added; "you will be glad to hear it, I feel sure!"

"Come at once, and try it!" said Rachel, who had not moved from the piano. "Keith, I didn't expect this laxity from you. You told us last time that we wasted quite five minutes in beginning. Ten would be truer to-day!"

Brydain moved with a smile; Etrenne and Miss Armitage followed his example; he placed them in their right positions, and they began to go through the music. An hour of hard work followed, and then, as they came to the end of the final trio, and Rachel played the few bars of symphony after it, Brydain threw his music on the top of the piano with a gesture that was almost boyish in its elation.

"There!" he said, with a smile. "If nothing dreadful happens to our voices between to-day and to-morrow, we ought to get through this very creditably. We know it, at any rate."

"Let us hope we shall convey that fact to the audience," said Miss Armitage, laughing as she sank into a chair with a mock expression of exhaustion on her face.

"If we do not, it will not be Mr. Brydain's fault," said Etrenne. "I think," she added to him, smiling, "there should be a vote of thanks—isn't that the proper thing to say!—to you, for your patience!"

Before Brydain had ended a fervent disclaimer of the need for any patience on his part, tea was brought up, and they all assembled round the fire, which grew still more welcome as the damp afternoon closed. Mrs. Kingston and Tiny were out, paying calls; Dr. Kingston never made his appearance at tea; and so the four were left to take it together. Brydain, after he had handed Etrenne and Miss Armitage their cups, sat down with his own beside the former on the wide sofa. A little animated discussion was going on as to dress. The action of the operetta took place in the end of the last century; the two women characters

were respectively a milkmaid and a country beauty of that date. Brydain had explained very early in the proceedings that all that was needed in the way of dress was a general accordance with the period, and, above all, simplicity.

Each woman had had her own theories as to what constituted simplicity, and each now wished to demonstrate them to Brydain. This accomplished, and his approval gained, a short discussion took place of the final details of arrangement—such as where Brydain was to find them when he wished the operetta to begin; where the piano was to be placed, and so forth. These details all settled, a little silence followed, and then Miss Armitage launched into a long description of the difficulty she had had in getting the stuff she wanted for her frock. This was directed, in the first instance, to Rachel, and in a very few moments, so few that no one could have defined how it happened, Etrenne Farrant and Brydain had wholly dropped out of the conversation, and had begun an apparently engrossing one of their own. He talked with the utmost ease and absorption, and she answered him with the same. As the moments went on, both of them seemed to have utterly forgotten that there was any one else to whom it was necessary to speak. He was still talking fast, with his eyes on Etrenne's face, when the sound of the clock on the mantelpiece striking six, and a simultaneous movement from Miss Armitage, seemed suddenly to rouse him.

"Six!" he exclaimed; "it can't be! I meant to be in my rooms by six!"

"You won't, I am afraid!" said Rachel, laughing, as, at her request, she rang and ordered a cab for Etrenne. Miss Armitage refused to be driven this time; she intended to walk to the station for a constitutional, she said. As she wanted to catch the earliest possible train, however, she hurried into her hat and jacket, and almost as soon as Etrenne's cab had been ordered, she had made her farewells and gone downstairs, escorted by Rachel.

Etrenne was left with Brydain. Alone together, they did not, as might have been expected, resume the conversation that had been so suddenly broken off. Etrenne put on her veil, and fastened her jacket, and began to put on her gloves silently, while Brydain, standing by the mantelshef, played, equally silently, with a little carved ebony box upon it. There was a most unwonted air of constraint about Brydain, and he did not look at Etrenne. She,

having put on her gloves, lifted her chatelaine, and then let it fall again with a sharp little jingle. "Oh!" she said, "my button-hook isn't there; and I can't fasten these gloves without it. I hope Rachel can find me one. I'll go and ask her, I think." She moved towards the door. With the movement, the odd constraint seemed to fall away from Brydain.

"Allow me," he said, intercepting her quickly. She held out her hand with a smile; Brydain lifted it, and began to fasten her gloves with nervous fingers. Etrenne did not speak, and as Brydain fastened the last button, Rachel appeared at the door.

"I don't want to hurry you, Etrenne," she said; "but here is your cab."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON the following evening—the evening of the party—Rachel and Tiny were standing together over a fire in a room which had once been their school-room, and was now their morning-room. They used it indiscriminately for needlework, painting, practising, or whatever might be their occupation of the moment. They had each quite finished dressing, though it was only just past ten o'clock; and as the invitations had been sent out for half-past, they had nearly half an hour before they need go into the drawing-room.

Rachel was wearing a frock which was an effective mixture of mauve and pale green; and Tiny was looking very pretty in a white frock with yellow marguerites round the hem and shoulders. She had one white elbow on the mantelshelf and was leaning her small face on her hand, while Rachel gazed thoughtfully into the fire, and moved her foot slowly backwards and forwards along the brass rail of the fender. They had been evidently talking of something that called for a good deal of thought; and when Rachel spoke she broke a silence which had lasted for some moments.

"Then you think," she said, slowly, "that Keith does not mean anything?"

"I can only say again, what I said before," responded Tiny, "that I do not understand him; and that is all about it!"

"If you had seen him yesterday afternoon, it would have seemed to you impossible to misunderstand him," said Rachel. "They were entirely taken up with one another; and I thought, honestly, as I

told you, that when I came up to the drawing-room to fetch Etrenne I was interrupting his proposal. But Etrenne was just the same as usual afterwards; and so was he when he said good-bye. It is very odd," she said, perplexedly.

"As to being taken up with one another," said Tiny, quickly, "they couldn't have been more taken up with one another than they were that night at 'Lohengrin,' and that is nearly a year ago. I chaffed Keith about her a little then, but he didn't like it a bit; he was so odd, in fact, that I thought that it must be all my fancy and I had better hold my tongue. So I never spoke of it, as you know, till you spoke to me."

"I should never have done so, or thought of doing so, but for yesterday. Keith has been rather engrossed in Etrenne all through the rehearsals, I fancied; but yesterday there was no room for mistake, any one must have said so. I suppose we shall see to-night," she added, slowly.

"We shall see what we shall see!" laughed Tiny. "You may be very sure I shall look! But I believe firmly that it's imagination on your part. I shouldn't mind," she added, reflectively, "I should be pleased if I was mistaken. I like Etrenne, and I should like her for a cousin—if Keith must marry," she added. "I think he's much better as he is, and I believe he does too! I don't think he would be so silly as to fall in love," she ended, confidently.

At nineteen Tiny Kingston had announced it as her unalterable conviction that it was an extremely weak-minded action to fall in love, and one which she never intended to commit. As yet she was only twenty, and held to her statement with all the tenacity of girlhood.

Rachel gave an odd little sigh at her sister's words.

"I believe Etrenne would say yes if Keith asked her," she said. "She was quite as engrossed with him as he with her yesterday. I don't mean that she led him on," she added, "but——"

"Oh, no," interrupted Tiny. "Etrenne is very nice. Do you know," she added, suddenly looking at the clock on the mantelpiece, "that it is twenty minutes past, and we had better go to the drawing-room; mother will be expecting us. Now you believe Keith's feelings for Etrenne are real, I say they are imaginary. If it wasn't rather school-girlish I'd have a bet with you," Tiny ended, as with a little

flourish of the gloves she had not yet put on, she ran out of the room. Rachel gave a little touch to her train, and followed her in more sober fashion.

While Rachel and Tiny Kingston were thus talking of her over the fire, Etenne Farrant was dressing in her own room at home.

Her maid was fastening her gown, a very pretty gown of a soft apricot colour. Yellow, in all its shades, seemed to have been made for Etenne Farrant; nothing else so heightened and set off her lovely brunette colouring, and she very rarely wore any other colour. She stood, rather impatiently, while the woman finished what she was doing; and then, "You can go, Wilson," she said; "I can do the rest myself. Mind you don't forget anything that I said I should want; and let me know when the carriage is here." The woman left the room, and Etenne flung her cloak round her, and then sat down in an arm-chair, looking into the fire. Over her pretty face there crept countless varying expressions as she gazed with unseeing eyes at the flames. She was thinking to-night—as she had done on that summer afternoon nine months before, when she sat and looked at the sunshine on the river from Mr. Reid's house-boat—of Keith Brydain.

Since the day when she had been constrained, on account of her mother's illness, to postpone the dinner invitation Mrs. Farrant had, at her request, sent to Brydain, her wish to see more of him had, instead of dying away, strengthened and deepened. Perhaps part of this was feminine contrariety. If she had seen Brydain then she might have still liked him, and even gone so far as to look upon him as a pleasant friend, and then her interest in him might have ended. But, as it was, the suddenly broken-off acquaintance was, to her, tantalising and irritating in its incompleteness. Throughout the long winter in Algiers, she had, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, let her mind revert frequently to the interest Brydain's personality had possessed for her.

It was in vain that she told herself that he was interesting, no doubt, at first, but that when she knew him well, he would turn out to be quite as dull as every other young man. There was an interest about the remembrance of him which would not be dispelled by the most practical reasoning on her part; and her desire to

meet him again strengthened with every effort to laugh it away.

She was almost as gratified as she was surprised when she saw his name on the Steinway Hall programme, and she watched him when he appeared, and afterwards when she congratulated him, with her curiosity doubled by the halo of his interesting position that day. On the afternoon when he came to her mother's house, some of her curiosity had been satisfied. She had developed his acquaintance in the conversation they had, and with the development had come increased appreciation of him, accentuated for her by the instinctive contrast she drew between Brydain and the other two young men.

This had been followed by the rehearsals. Seeing him so frequently had not, as she had argued in Algiers that it inevitably must, disillusioned her. She had grown with each rehearsal to like him more and more. Etenne did not disguise from herself the fact, of which she had been unconscious at the time, that it was because he had asked it that she had consented to sing the part; and further, that it was to satisfy him, and fulfil his wishes, that she had taken infinite pains to perfect herself in it. Hers was not a painstaking nature, and all effort was unaccustomed and difficult to her. She did not try to hide from herself either the fact that each rehearsal had left her with a greater impatience for the next to come; and that in each the interest in Brydain which she had now learned to own as a liking, had strengthened until it was now very strong.

She had not been aware, until the day before, when they were left alone in the Kingstons' drawing-room, how strong it was. As Brydain took her hand in his to fasten her glove, she had, all at once, thought of him no longer as a friend she liked, but as a man she might easily learn to love. Such a light had never flashed on her before, and she had found it bewildering in its suddenness. Brydain was so utterly unlike all the men whom Etenne had as yet associated with the idea of love or lovers, that no idea of him as such had ever hitherto entered her head. He was completely dissociated, by this dissimilarity, from any such train of ideas, to her mind. Now, however, it was all altered; she knew, as she drove home from the Kingstons' that afternoon, that the next time she saw Brydain she should have to meet him on different terms; and

as she sat gazing into the fire, she was thinking what those terms were to be.

She was by no means convinced that he had any feelings for her; indeed, she very much doubted if it were so. He had not shown her the existence of such. And she was naturally determined not to betray the existence of hers for him, under the circumstances. She would scarcely own, even now to herself, that they existed.

"Fallen in love!" she said angrily to herself, as she twisted the riband of her cloak into a knot with restless fingers. "No—it's nothing of the kind! I've not done anything so humiliating and foolish. I am not in love with Mr. Brydain!"

At this moment Wilson knocked at her door to say that the carriage was waiting; and with nothing more definite than an overwhelming sense of constraint at the thought of their meeting, she rose and went to say good-night to her mother before starting.

Mrs. Farrant, who had not improved in health during the last few weeks, was, to her own vexation and disappointment, by no means well enough to accompany her daughter.

In a very short time Etrenne was following her name into Mrs. Kingston's drawing-room. It was crowded, and, after her greeting to her hostess, she became aware, to her relief, that Brydain was nowhere visible; and also that she was scarcely likely to be thrown in any contact with him except where the immediate neighbourhood of crowds of other people would take away all constraint. Etrenne's set was much the same as the Kingstons', and she was instantly claimed on all sides by acquaintances. One or other of them engaged her until all the first part of the programme was gone through. She only once caught sight of Brydain, in the extreme distance, talking to Mr. Lennard, before Tiny came up to her and said that there were only two songs before the operetta, and suggested that she should come

and dress. She acquiesced, and when she came down in her large hat and white frock ready to sing, she was so intent on a mental inventory of all her weak places in the music that she hardly realised that it was Brydain who met her at the side door of the drawing-room and said, as simply as if they had met before:

"I am so glad you're ready. How awfully nice that get-up is!"

He waited one moment, at her request, for Miss Armitage, who arrived directly, and then he took them both into the space cleared for them in the drawing-room, and Rachel began the introductory music.

Three-quarters of an hour later every one in the crowded drawing-room was congratulating Mrs. Kingston on the success of the operetta.

Brydain, after being detained to hear a grim word of amused approval from Mr. Lennard and a well-satisfied comment from Tredennis, had escaped downstairs to change his dress and to take a moment's breathing space. As he came up the stairs again on his return, he saw, descending the flight above, Etrenne, who had been bent on the same errand, and had changed her picturesque white frock for her ordinary evening gown. They met on the landing. There was on the landing a very wide recess, almost big enough to be called a small room. It was fitted with couches and cushions, and to-night it was full of flowers and plants. It was empty at the moment, and Brydain drew Etrenne into it with a quick gesture.

"I wanted to thank you," he said. "You were admirable! You made it all go!"

"Miss Armitage did that, I think. You should thank her," Etrenne answered.

"It is you I want to thank," he said.

Etrenne was about to repeat her words when, looking up at him, her lovely grey eyes fell under his gaze.

"I am very glad you were pleased," she said.

NOTE.

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